Traces of the Past

The Homestead Act of 1862 offered settlers the opportunity of a lifetime – title to their own property in exchange for improvements to the land. In the Ozarks, fertile acreage along creeks and rivers was settled first, while vacant pockets of less desirable land lay unclaimed atop slopes and ridges. As time passed and populations grew, these islands of public land disappeared as well. Solomon "Sod" Collier and his family were among the many 20th century settlers who laid claim to these remnants as foundations for a new life.

The Colliers left Kentucky one cold February day in 1928 and headed west for Arkansas on advice of Sod’s brother. Sod and his wife, Ida Mae, and four of their seven children caravanned along with family in a pickup truck. Those who didn’t fit in the cab of the truck huddled together in the bed, covered by only a tarp. After a week of traveling the Colliers finally arrived at their destination. At the time Sod carried but fifteen cents in his pocket, but held out much hope for their future in this new land.

Today, the Collier Homestead provides one of the many glimpses into the past that is visible up hollows, atop ridges, and along the river corridor. Each structure and scene is being preserved for its historic value – testimony to the dreams and persistence of families determined to make a new life in the Ozarks.

Tyler Bend Visitor Center: 870-439-2502
Emergency Dispatch: 888-692-1162
http://www.nps.gov/buff

Collier Homestead
BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER

An Opportunity

An Opportunity to travel back in time to a simpler era of life.
Realizing the Dream

Within three years of their arrival in the area, the Collier family’s dreams began to become a reality. Sod secured a forty-acre tract of land at Tyler Bend and began making the improvements that were required to obtain a homestead patent. While a storage shed served as the family’s first shelter, a house soon took shape amidst a clearing. The land was cultivated and fenced, and outbuildings, including barns and a smokehouse, were constructed. A paling fence (today a replica) was built around the yard, serving to keep animals out rather than in. By 1937, Sod Collier and his family had improved the land enough to become its rightful owners, thus becoming some of the last settlers in the river valley to acquire land under the 1862 Homestead Act.

The family led a farming life. Hogs and cattle were raised for meat; corn, oats, cane, apples, peaches, and other garden produce were grown and canned to keep the pantry stocked thorough even the hardest winter. An avid gardener, Mrs. Collier was knowledgeable about the medicinal value of plants – those that caught her eye often became part of her ample garden.

Sod spent his spare time hunting, fishing, and acting as a river guide on the Buffalo for anglers in search of that “perfect spot”. Together the Colliers lived a simple life on their small farm, with no electricity or indoor plumbing until 1961.

Everyday Life

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The National Park Service wishes to thank the Collier family for their assistance in sharing photos, time and memories. We also acknowledge the efforts of the volunteers and park staff who donated much time towards restoration of the homesite.